

Appendix D

LITTLE DONEY LAKE CONSERVATION EASEMENT

DRAFT SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

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I. INTRODUCTION

House Bill 526, passed by the 1987 Legislature (MCA 87-1-241 and MCA 87-1-242), authorizes Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) to acquire an interest in land for the purpose of protecting and improving wildlife habitat. These acquisitions can be through fee title, conservation easements, or leasing. In 1989, the Montana legislature passed House Bill 720 requiring that a socioeconomic assessment be completed when wildlife habitat is acquired using Habitat Montana monies. These assessments evaluate the significant social and economic impacts of the purchase on local governments, employment, schools, and impacts on local businesses.

This socioeconomic evaluation addresses the acquisition of a conservation easement on the Little Doney Lake property by FWP from The Nature Conservancy (TNC). This report addresses the physical and institutional setting as well as the social and economic impacts associated with the proposed conservation easement.

II. PHYSICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

A. Property Description

The subject property is located about 50 miles from Missoula, Mt., in Powell County, adjoining the administrative boundary of the Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area (BCWMA). This conservation easement purchase encompasses approximately 1,103 acres. A detailed description of this property is included in the draft environmental assessment (EA).

B. Habitat and Wildlife Populations

This property is mainly vegetated with ponderosa pine, western larch and Douglas-fir. This property and the adjacent lands are important elk wintering range and support large numbers of mule deer and white-tailed deer. Moose, black bear, grizzly bear, and mountain lions utilize the property year round.

C. Current Use

The Little Doney Lake property burned during a large forest fire in 1919, and has been extensively logged. It currently supports early seral forest, browse, and grass. No commercial uses occur on the property at this time.

D. Management Alternatives

1. Purchase the Little Doney Lake Conservation Easement.
2. No purchase

MFWP Conservation Easement Purchase

The intent of the Little Doney Lake Conservation Easement is to protect and enhance the montane forest habitat, and enhance the overall integrity of the private, BCWMA, DNRC, Nature Conservancy, and Forest Service lands surrounding the property.

No Purchase Alternative

The no purchase alternative requires some assumptions since use and management of the property will vary depending on what future owners would decide to do with the property. There is potential for subdivision of this land that would impact the habitat and access opportunities for the public.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Section II identified the management alternatives this report addresses. The conservation easement will provide long-term protection of important wildlife habitat and consistent management of this land. Section III quantifies the social and economic consequences of the two management alternatives following two basic accounting stances: financial and local area impacts.

Financial impacts address the cost of the conservation easement purchase to MFWP and discuss the impacts on tax revenues to local government agencies including school districts.

Expenditure data associated with the use of the property provides information for analyzing the impacts these expenditures may have on local businesses (i.e., income and employment).

A. Financial Impacts

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) will contribute \$323,626 toward the conservation easement on the 1,103-acre Little Doney Lake property from the Habitat Montana program. MFWP may also contribute \$250,000 towards this easement purchase from the MT Migratory Bird Stamp Program. MFWP also applied for and received a grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to acquire conservation easements benefiting native westslope cutthroat and bull trout. The Little Doney Lake parcel was specifically identified for funding in that grant;

\$600,000 of these USFWS funds will be used to help purchase this conservation easement. A detailed description of the conservation easement funding package is included in the attached Draft EA.

The financial impacts to local governments are the potential changes in tax revenues resulting from the conservation easement.

The sale of a conservation easement on the land to FWP will not change the tax revenues that Powell County currently collects on the subject property. The property under conservation easement will be taxed at the same rate as at present.

B. Economic Impacts

There will not be any significant financial impacts to local businesses associated with the purchase of a conservation easement by FWP.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The purchase by FWP of a conservation easement will provide long term protection for wildlife habitat, maintain the open space integrity of the land, and enhance public recreation.

This action will not cause a reduction in tax revenues on this property from their current levels to Powell County under Montana Code 87-1-603. Overall financial impacts to local business will be minimal. Recreational opportunities will be enhanced which may result in small yet positive impacts for local businesses that provide services to recreationists.